

**Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**March 22, 2006**  
**Miles City**

RAC Members Present: Marion Hanson, Larry Pilster, Darryl Olson, Charles Hauptman, Nathaniel Hagerott, Jack Bailey, Howard Boggess, Robert Lubbers, Betty Aye, Jerry Reichert, John Gibson, Mack Cole

**Howery Island Project – Brenda Witkowski**

Brenda updated the RAC on the Howery Island Restoration Project which involves the removal of Russian olive and salt cedar. Two hundred acres of the area has been treated and is showing the growth of more desirable species. Future objectives include the use of prescribed fire, continued cooperation with Treasure County, and managing for native plant species. This spring BLM will be monitoring plots and treating areas that are resprouting.

The RAC members would like to tour Howery Island.

**Billings Field Office Update – Sandy Brooks**

**Pompeys Pillar Construction**

A paved ½-mile road and parking lot will be constructed this spring or fall, and the walkway will be completed this summer. The interpretive center exhibits will be installed in April, and the center dedicated on July 22, the first day of the four-day Clark on the Yellowstone National Signature Event. Sandy will be looking for volunteers to help with the event. The new interpretive center will open to the public when the Pillar opens on Memorial Day weekend.

**Pryor Mountain**

Billings Field Office is working on an environmental assessment to gather horses this summer by bait trapping. The horses will be lured into traps into the corrals with mineral and protein blocks and then captured. The proposal is to remove 12 stallions (4-8 years old) and 12 yearlings. This process will be much lower key than the helicopter gather and less expensive. The BLM will continue the fertility control program this year to immunocontracept 24 older mares. At the present time there are 135 adult horses and 24 foals.

**Horsethief**

BLM is continuing fuel reduction projects in the Horsethief area west of Roundup. Phase Two of the project required the removal of excess small diameter pine and juniper.

The RAC would like to tour the area.

**Bundy Bridge Island**

Sandy stated that after review, the solicitor concluded the island belong to the Bureau of Land Management. Yellowstone County has submitted an application to the BLM for a Recreation and Public Purposes Act lease of 20 acres on the island. It wants to construct a boat ramp, parking lot and road. The BLM will complete an environmental assessment (EA) and publish a Notice of Realty Action in the Federal Register.

There is a trespass issued on the island that has not been closed. BLM issued a trespass notice to a responsible party and requested the party provide BLM documentation showing they are not in trespass. At this time the party has not provided documentation to indicate they own or control the island. The BLM is still negotiating with the party and offered to settle the trespass if the party reseeds the area to native vegetation.

### **Grove Creek**

The owner of the undeveloped subdivided private land in Grove Creek bought the private portion of the Meeteetse Spires with the intent of doing a land exchange with BLM. The concern is that the BLM lands are worth about 1/10 of the private lands in the Meeteetse Spires which would mean trading a large acreage to acquire the Meeteetse Spires tract.

### **Shepherd Ah Nei Off Highway Vehicle Area**

The area is open, depending on the weather, and is monitored every weekend and many weekdays. An area of concern is the riders creating new trails on the site. There are still complaints from a private landowner about the noise in this area. In January 2007, the BLM will implement a user fee. The RAC members suggested educating the motorcyclists on the policy.

There was discussion with people camping for an extended period of time on BLM land. Lori Harbargh stated that they can camp for 14 days, but then must move a certain distance to a new location.

There was discussion on the use of ATV's for hunting. It was suggested that BLM support not using an ATV for hunting.

### **Miles City Update – Dave McIlroy**

The employees have moved into the new building. The next phase is the remodeling of the existing main building. The contract has been let and completion is expected for next year.

In August, the President signed an energy bill which identified Miles City as an energy pilot office. Eleven additional positions were identified for the Miles City Office.

The staff is working on a prescribed fire in the Pine Hills area.

### **Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange**

The inventory has been completed on the Pumpkin Creek Land Exchange. The BLM is working on the appraisal for the public land.

### **Knowlton Area**

The BLM developed a travel management plan. Signs were installed last year before hunting season.

### **Sage Grouse Update**

The Southeastern Montana Sage Grouse Working Group held a local working group meeting in Miles City in March. A variety of topics were addressed and included an overview of the Northeastern Wyoming Working Group's projects, predation, range projects and the question of where the Southeastern Montana Working Group is headed. They will be planning a field trip to look at habitat enhancement projects and other potential projects.

### **Hay Draw**

There were trespass violations on private land that were dealt with by Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The area continues to be monitored by BLM and FWP.

### **Miles City RMP & SEIS Update – Bloom**

#### **SEIS Supplement**

A newsletter went out to the mailing list and resulted in BLM developing another phased development alternative with less wells. There is a delay on the schedule due to BLM waiting on the air modeling. BLM and collaborators such as the RAC will be reviewing the preliminary draft from 5/1/2006 to 5/19/2006. BLM will be review the air quality section from 6/19/2006 – 6/23/2006. The public comment period on the draft will be 8/4/2006 – 11/1/2006. Public hearings and meetings will be 9/11/2006 – 9/14/2006. The final should be out in February 2006 with a 30 day protest period. The Record of Decision will be issued in June 2007.

#### **Miles City RMP**

BLM has completed Chapter 1 of the RMP and is working on Chapter 2. BLM and the collaborators will work together to form the alternatives to existing management at a meeting from April 18–20. BLM and collaborators will be reviewing Chapter 1-4 in July. The entire preliminary draft will be completed September. The Final RMP will be completed March 2008 and the ROD is scheduled to be issued in May 2008. BLM continues to work around the supplemental SEIS.

It was requested that BLM give the new RAC members a copy of the scoping document for the RMP.

There was discussion on the RMP revision combining two different RMP areas. A newsletter will be sent out this month.

### **New Grazing Regulations-Dave McIlnay**

BLM is still working on the grazing regulations.

### **Discussion Items**

There was discussion on monitoring the public land. It was brought up that we do not have enough law enforcement in Montana to monitor the public land. It was thought that other states have more enforcement than Montana. Lori stated that Federal regulations can only be enforced by federal law enforcement on the public land and the sheriffs' departments enforce any other actions. It was asked why BLM and the sheriffs' departments cannot work together to enforce the same laws. Lori stated that a county sheriff cannot enforce federal laws unless he attends the Federal Law Enforcement Academy.

There was concern about the retiring of an allotment in the Big Timber area permanently by a nonprofit agency for the recovery of grizzly bears and wolves. The concern was what would happen to the revenue.

The RAC discussed the funding of the Secure Rural Schools Funding Act through the selling of federal lands. The RAC passed a resolution opposing the sale of public land to reduce the federal deficit. All the RAC members present signed a letter to that effect to be sent to the Secretary of Interior.

Discussion of a big corporation buying private land for hunting, fishing and then leasing the land to outfitters for private hunting was discussed. The local hunters are being forced off of the public land and the new owners are not giving public access to the public. Outfitters should not have public access if the local hunters do not. If a road is opened to commercial use, then it should be opened to the public or the permittee should not be able to use it for recreation either. David McIlnay stated the RMP will be addressing outfitters and guides. There is an easement across state land and deeded land at Hay Draw to access public land.

The next meeting will be July 19 in Billings, Montana, starting at 7:00 a.m. There will be a social on July 18 at the Petroleum Club.

Topics: Pompey's Pillar Tour and Yellowstone River island ownership